

joint exercises to improve the alliance and member-state readiness. That is a big challenge, but that challenge is one that needs to be addressed.

In terms of more traditional warfighting, NATO has taken on missions in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya, and continued challenges will need to be addressed. It is not yet clear to me whether ISAF, the Afghanistan mission, will go down as a success or not, but it is clearly in the balance and needs to be carefully monitored.

It is clear that the Libya operation revealed numerous alliance shortcomings and was not a model of alliance coherence and cohesion. Rather, Libya was an example of failure at the political level to define the new NATO. The correct response to both, new challenges and admitted failure, is better leadership, better vision, and creative new thinking, along with the resources to carry out those goals.

I have suggested that these could be best applied in response to the Syria disaster, especially with the humanitarian catastrophe and the migrant crisis. I proposed that NATO could have helped member-state Turkey get control of its Syrian border to stop the flow of jihadists into and out of Syria.

It is clear to me that the uncontrolled flood of refugees from Syria could best be handled by creating safe areas in and near Syria so that the Syrian people can remain there under safe and humane conditions. Building on NATO's Bosnia experience, the Alliance could be critical to providing the security for such areas on the ground and in the air. This would not be fighting the war in Syria but protecting the populations of U.N. designated areas. Difficult? You bet, but it has been done before, and NATO is the only possible organization that is in a position to do it.

Although I emphatically believe that NATO continues to have enormous value to U.S. interests and global stability, I do concede that it needs a new vision of its role. That is clearly a work in progress and will have some false starts and failures along the way. How it turns out will not only be a function of resources, as I have discussed, but also an issue of leadership. On that score, I have some concerns. Frankly, I am worried.

The Obama administration seems to be guiding us toward a dangerous deference to others to address emerging global security challenges that are and will be threats to our own national security. The most alarming example is our acquiescence to Russia's vigorous engagement in Syria. Russia basically hijacked our paltry efforts to bring the Syrian disaster under control, inserted its military forces to change the dynamic on the ground, and guided the political process toward their ends. It has all been a sad display of American incompetence and impotence. The United States and its allies are paying the price for this failure of engagement.

After reading President Obama's recent and lengthy interview on foreign policy that was published in the Atlantic Monthly, I can tell he has not drawn the correct conclusions from the foreign policy failures in recent years in Libya, Syria, Ukraine, Russia, and elsewhere. For me, we have abdicated America's traditional leadership role. For the alliance, I fear this could be the beginning phase of our disengagement from Europe, which, if it continues, will be at our peril. Without firm U.S. leadership of NATO, we will begin to see the commitment of our allies weaken. They simply do not have the muscle or the financial capability to support a NATO coalition without U.S. leadership. Without the right kind of leadership, the importance of the transatlantic security relationship and the continued robust presence of U.S. forces in Europe will begin to lose advocates, as perhaps has already occurred among those who do not support our efforts.

If Americans come to see NATO's value in financial terms—bang for the buck—we will lose sight of its real value in the proper terms of national security, American reliability, and the eternal appeal of our community of values—in other words, the values beyond price that must be preserved if we are to prevail against our adversaries.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FUNDING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about why all of us are here. The primary role of Congress is to responsibly fund the Federal Government. To do that, we must set clear national priorities that we can financially support. All too often, the process of setting, and then sticking to these national priorities has become a purely political exercise, not a function of governing. It is the No. 1 complaint I hear when I travel back to my home State of Georgia.

Coming from the business world, I clearly see two interlocking crises we face as a country. First, we have a global security crisis. The world may be more dangerous right now than at

any point in my lifetime. Interlocked with that is our national debt crisis that threatens the ability we have to defend our country today.

As we begin the appropriations process, let's take an honest look at what we are appropriating for. One of our top national priorities is to provide for the national defense. It is one of only 6 reasons 13 Colonies got together in the first place; that is, to provide for the national defense. However, under Presidents Carter, Clinton, and Obama, we saw three different periods of disinvestment in our military. Our 30-year average of defense spending has been 4.2 percent of GDP. Following the Carter administration, the Reagan administration recapped the military. Then, we had another decline. You see the buildup in the surge in Afghanistan and Iraq, behind two wars.

We have been at war for 15 years. I believe in many cases we have burnt out our equipment, and in cases we are beginning to do that with our personnel, with longer tours and more difficult assignments in this hybrid war we are facing today.

Then you see under this administration a further decline, now to 3.1 percent of GDP. This is the lowest point since the Vietnam War, and the irony of that is that we are still spending \$600 billion of \$4 trillion total spending of the Federal Government on our military. The irony is the 30-year average of 4.2 percent, which is a hundred basis points below what we're currently spending—that's almost \$200 billion—in a \$19 trillion economy.

The question is how do we determine the priorities to keep a strong military? To make sure we can fulfill one of six reasons we came together as a country.

We are about to have the smallest Army since World War II, the smallest Navy since World War I, and the smallest and oldest Air Force ever. How can this be? The world is more dangerous right now than at any time in my lifetime.

We see increased aggression from traditional rivals, Russia and China. We also see the rise of ISIS, partly because of our own intransigence. They have to be stopped now, or we are going to have to deal with them later here. Boko Haram, Al Qaeda, ISIS—all of these threats are beginning to be interconnected and pose threats not just in the Middle East, but around the world.

Finally, we have nuclear threats from rogue regimes, like North Korea and Iran, and emerging, game-changing technologies, such as cyber threats, which nations like Russia are using for hybrid warfare right now in Eastern Europe. There is an emerging arms race in space. This is why our women and men in uniform need to have the tools and resources to complete their missions around the world.

This fiscal crisis is jeopardizing our ability to actually fund the missions being asked of our military today. Let me give two examples. JSTARS is a